

CLAIMS

What is Claimed is:

1. A system for receiving product orders and order payments from customers and presenting ordered products to the respective customers, the system comprising:
 - 5 a) a plurality of order entry devices configured to receive the orders from the customers directly without needing an order-taking attendant;
 - b) a plurality of payment processing devices configured to receive and process at least some of the order payments from the customers directly without needing an order-taking attendant;
 - 10 c) a plurality of product delivery stations adapted for presenting the ordered products to the customers; and
 - d) a main computer in communication with the order entry devices and the payment processing devices, wherein the main computer is programmed to correlate the orders with the product delivery stations.
2. The system of Claim 1, further comprising one or more delivery station display devices, wherein the order entry devices or the payment processing devices are configured to output to the customers tickets with identifiers associated therewith and corresponding to the orders, and the delivery station display devices are configured to display to the customers the identifiers, wherein the customers can match the identifiers associated with their tickets to the corresponding delivery station display devices to determine at which of the delivery stations to receive their respective ordered products.

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3. The system of Claim 2, wherein the identifiers comprise order identifiers and the delivery station display devices comprise variable display devices in communication with the main computer and configured to display the order identifiers, wherein the customers can match the order identifiers associated with their tickets to the order identifiers displayed on the delivery station display devices to determine at which of the delivery stations to receive their respective ordered products.

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4. The system of Claim 3, wherein the tickets have codes associated therewith, and further comprising code readers configured to read the codes, disposed proximate to each of the delivery stations, and in communication with the main computer, wherein the main computer is programmed to remove the order identifiers from the delivery station display devices in response to the codes being read by the code reader.

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5. The system of Claim 2, wherein the delivery station display devices comprise fixed indicia associated with the delivery stations and the identifiers comprise the delivery station indicia, wherein the customers can match the delivery station indicia associated with their tickets to the delivery station indicia associated with the delivery stations to determine at which of the delivery stations to receive their respective ordered products.

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6. The system of Claim 2, wherein the one or more delivery station display devices comprises a plurality of delivery station display devices with each one of them disposed proximate to one of the delivery stations.

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5 7. The system of Claim 2, further comprising a plurality of delivery attendant output devices and a plurality of product preparation zones arranged with each one of the delivery attendant output devices associated with one of the product preparation zones and one of the product delivery stations, wherein the delivery attendant output devices are configured to output to product delivery attendants the orders and the identifiers.

10 8. The system of Claim 7, wherein the main computer is programmed to send the orders to the delivery attendant output devices associated with the product delivery stations having a fewest number of orders that are unfulfilled.

15 9. The system of Claim 7, wherein the products comprise a plurality of different types of products, each of the product delivery stations are arranged to deliver one or more of the types of products, and the main computer is programmed to send the orders to the delivery attendant output devices associated with the type of product ordered.

20 10. The system of Claim 2, wherein the tickets include payment indicia indicating whether or not the payment has been received, and further comprising one or more cashier stations in communication with the main computer and configured to receive and process order payments in cash and configured to mark the tickets with the payment indicia indicating that the payment has been received or to output a secondary ticket having associated therewith the identifier and the payment indicia indicating that the payment has been received.

25 11. The system of Claim 2, further comprising a building, wherein at least some of the customers are carryout or eat-in customers, and wherein at least some of the order entry devices, at least some of the payment processing devices, at least some of the product delivery stations, at least some of the delivery station display devices, and the main computer are housed inside of the building, wherein the system is arranged for use by the carryout or eat-in customers.

5 12. The system of Claim 2, further comprising a building and a row of vehicle lanes, wherein at least some of the customers are drive-through customers, and wherein the main computer is housed inside of the building, at least some of the order entry devices and at least some of the payment processing devices are disposed outside of the building and adjacent the lanes, and at least some of the product delivery stations are accessible from outside of the building, wherein the system is arranged for use by the drive-through customers.

10 13. A system for receiving product orders and order payments from customers and presenting ordered products to the respective customers, the system comprising:

15 a) a plurality of user interface devices each including an order entry device and a payment processing device, wherein the order entry devices are configured to receive the orders from the customers and the payment processing devices are configured to receive and process at least some of the order payments, wherein the user interface devices are configured to output to the customers tickets with identifiers associated therewith and corresponding to the orders;

20 b) a plurality of product delivery stations adapted for presenting the ordered products to the customers;

25 c) a plurality of delivery station display devices with each one disposed proximate to one of the delivery stations and configured to display to the customers the identifiers, wherein the customers can match the identifiers associated with their tickets to the corresponding delivery station display devices to determine at which of the delivery stations to receive their respective ordered products;

d) one or more delivery attendant output devices associated with the product delivery stations and configured to output to product delivery attendants the orders and the identifiers; and

5 e) a main computer in communication with the user interface device, the delivery station display devices, and the delivery attendant output devices, wherein the main computer is programmed to receive the orders and the order identifiers from the user interface and send the orders and the identifiers to the delivery station display devices and the delivery attendant output devices.

10 14. The system of Claim 13, wherein the identifiers comprise order identifiers and the delivery station display devices comprise variable display devices in communication with the main computer and configured to display the order identifiers, wherein the customers can match the order identifiers associated with their tickets to the order identifiers displayed on the delivery station display devices to determine at which of the delivery stations to receive their respective ordered products.

15 15. The system of Claim 14, wherein the tickets have codes associated therewith, and further comprising code readers configured to read the codes, disposed proximate to each of the delivery stations, and in communication with the main computer, wherein the main computer is programmed to remove the order identifiers from the delivery station display devices in response to the codes being read by the code reader.

25 16. The system of Claim 13, wherein the delivery station display devices comprise fixed indicia associated with the delivery stations and the identifiers comprise the delivery station indicia, wherein the customers can match the delivery station indicia associated with their tickets to the delivery station indicia associated with the delivery stations to determine at which of the delivery stations to receive their respective ordered products.

5 17. The system of Claim 13, wherein the tickets include payment indicia indicating whether or not the payment has been received, and further comprising one or more cashier stations in communication with the main computer and configured to receive and process order payments in cash and configured to mark the tickets with the payment indicia indicating that the payment has been received or to output a secondary ticket having associated therewith the identifier and the payment indicia indicating that the payment has been received.

10 18. The system of Claim 13, wherein the order entry devices are configured to receive the orders from the customers directly without needing an order-taking attendant and the payment processing devices are configured to receive and process at least some of the order payments from the customers directly without needing an order-taking attendant.

15 19. The system of Claim 13, further comprising a plurality of product preparation zones each one associated with one of the delivery stations, wherein the one or more delivery attendant output devices comprises a plurality of delivery attendant output devices with each one of them disposed proximate to one of the product preparation zones, and wherein the main computer is programmed to send the orders to the delivery attendant output devices associated with the product delivery stations having a fewest number of orders that are unfulfilled.

20 20. The system of Claim 13, further comprising a plurality product preparation zones each one associated with one of the delivery stations, wherein the one or more delivery attendant output devices comprises a plurality of delivery attendant output devices with each one of them disposed proximate to one of the product preparation zones, the products comprise a plurality of different types of products, each of the product delivery stations are arranged to deliver one or more of the types of products, and the main computer is programmed to send the orders to the delivery attendant output devices associated with the type of product ordered.

5 21. A system for receiving product orders and order payments from customers and presenting ordered products to the respective customers, the system comprising:

10 a) a plurality of user interface devices each including an order entry device and a payment processing device, wherein the order entry devices are configured to receive the orders from the customers and the payment processing devices are configured to receive and process at least some of the order payments;

15 b) a plurality of product delivery stations adapted for presenting the ordered products to the customers;

c) a plurality of product preparation zones each one associated with one of the product delivery stations;

d) a plurality of delivery attendant output devices each one associated with one of the product preparation zones and configured to output to the product delivery attendants the orders and the identifiers; and

20 e) a main computer in communication with the user interface device and the delivery attendant output devices, wherein the main computer is programmed to receive the orders and the order identifiers from the user interface and send the orders and the identifiers to the delivery attendant output devices.

22. The system of Claim 21, wherein each one of the product delivery stations is dedicated to one of the order entry devices.

25 23. The system of Claim 21, wherein the main computer is programmed to send the orders to the delivery attendant output devices associated with the product delivery stations having a fewest number of orders that are unfulfilled.

5 24. The system of Claim 21, wherein the products comprise a plurality of different types of products, each of the product delivery stations are arranged to deliver one or more of the types of products, and the main computer is programmed to send the orders to the delivery attendant output devices associated with the type of product ordered.

10 25. The system of Claim 21, wherein the user interface devices are configured to output to the customers tickets with identifiers associated therewith and corresponding to the orders, and further comprising a plurality of delivery station display devices with each one disposed proximate to one of the delivery stations and configured to display to the customers the identifiers, wherein the customers can match the identifiers associated with their tickets to the corresponding delivery station display devices to determine at which of the delivery stations to receive their respective ordered products.

15 26. The system of Claim 25, wherein the tickets include payment indicia indicating whether or not the payment has been received, and further comprising one or more cashier stations in communication with the main computer and configured to receive and process order payments in cash and configured to mark the tickets with the payment indicia indicating that the payment has been received or to output a secondary ticket having associated therewith the identifier and the payment indicia indicating that the payment has been received.

20 27. The system of Claim 21, wherein the order entry devices are configured to receive the orders from the customers directly without needing an order-taking attendant and the payment processing devices are configured to receive and process at least some of the order payments from the customers directly without needing an order-taking attendant.

28. A system for receiving product orders and order payments from customers and presenting ordered products to the respective customers, the system comprising:

5 a) a plurality of user interface devices each including an order entry device and a payment processing device, wherein the order entry devices are configured to receive the orders from the customers directly without needing an order-taking attendant and the payment processing devices are configured to receive and process at least some of the order payments from the customers directly without needing an order-taking attendant, wherein the user interface devices are configured to output to the customers tickets with identifiers associated therewith and corresponding to the orders;

10 b) a plurality of product delivery stations adapted for presenting the ordered products to the customers;

15 c) a plurality of delivery station display devices each one associated with one of the product delivery stations and configured to display to the customers the identifiers;

20 d) a plurality of product preparation zones each one associated with one of the product delivery stations;

25 e) a plurality of delivery attendant output devices each one associated with one of the product preparation zones and configured to output to the product delivery attendants the orders and the identifiers; and

30 f) a main computer in communication with the order entry devices, the payment processing devices, the delivery station display devices, and the delivery attendant output devices, wherein the main computer is programmed to receive the orders and identifiers from the user interface devices and to send them to the delivery attendant output devices and the delivery station display devices associated with the product delivery stations having a fewest number of orders that are unfulfilled, wherein the customers can match the identifiers associated with their tickets to the corresponding delivery station display devices to determine at which of the delivery stations to receive their respective ordered products.

5 29. The system of Claim 28, wherein the identifiers comprise order identifiers and the delivery station display devices comprise variable display devices in communication with the main computer and configured to display the order identifiers.

10 30. The system of Claim 29, wherein the tickets have codes associated therewith, and further comprising code readers configured to read the codes, disposed proximate to each of the delivery stations, and in communication with the main computer, wherein the main computer is programmed to remove the order identifiers from the delivery station display devices in response to the codes being read by the code reader.

15 31. The system of Claim 28, wherein the delivery station display devices comprise fixed indicia associated with the delivery stations and the identifiers comprise the delivery station indicia.

20 32. The system of Claim 28, wherein the tickets include payment indicia indicating whether or not the payment has been received, and further comprising one or more cashier stations in communication with the main computer and configured to receive and process order payments in cash and configured to mark the tickets with the payment indicia indicating that the payment has been received or to output a secondary ticket having associated therewith the identifier and the payment indicia indicating that the payment has been received.

25 33. The system of Claim 28, wherein the order entry devices comprise touch screen monitors and the payment processing devices comprise credit or debit card payment processors.

30 34. The system of Claim 28, wherein the order entry devices are spaced apart from the product delivery stations.

35. The system of Claim 28, wherein the order entry devices and the payment processing devices are configured integrally or disposed proximate to each other.

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36. The system of Claim 28, further comprising a building, wherein at least some of the user interface devices, at least some of the product delivery stations, the delivery station display devices, the product preparation zones, the delivery attendant output devices, and the main computer are housed inside of the building.

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37. A method of processing orders for products from customers, the method comprising:

- a) receiving the orders from the customers directly without an order-taking attendant;
- b) receiving and processing payments for at least some of orders from the customers directly without an order-taking attendant;
- c) outputting to the customers tickets with identifiers associated therewith and corresponding to the orders;
- d) correlating the identifiers to delivery station display devices and delivery attendant output devices associated with product delivery stations;
- e) displaying the identifiers on the delivery station devices, wherein the customers can match the identifiers associated with their tickets to the corresponding delivery station display devices to determine at which of the delivery stations to receive their respective ordered products;
- f) outputting the orders by the delivery attendant output devices;
- g) preparing the products based on the orders output by the delivery attendant output devices; and
- h) presenting the ordered products to the customers at the corresponding delivery stations.

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38. The method of Claim 37, wherein correlating the identifiers comprises assigning them to the delivery attendant output devices and the delivery station display devices associated with the product delivery stations having a fewest number of orders that are unfulfilled.

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39. The method of Claim 37, wherein outputting the tickets with identifiers comprises assigning order numbers or delivery station indicia to the orders.

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40. The method of Claim 37, wherein outputting the tickets with identifiers includes assigning codes to the orders, and further comprising reading the codes and, in response thereto, removing the identifiers from the delivery station display devices.

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41. The method of Claim 37, wherein receiving and processing payments for at least some of the orders comprises receiving and processing payments by credit or debit cards.

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42. The method of Claim 41, wherein receiving and processing the payments further comprises including on the tickets payment indicia indicating whether or not the payments have been received by a credit or debit card, and if the payments have not been received by a credit or debit card, then further comprising receiving and processing payments by cash and either marking the tickets with the payment indicia indicating that the payment has been received or outputting a secondary ticket having associated therewith the identifier and the payment indicia indicating that the payments have been received.

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43. The method of Claim 37, wherein the orders are received from the customers into order entry devices, at least some of the order payments are received from the customers into and processed by payment processing devices, and the tickets are output to the customers by the order entry devices or the payment processing devices.

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44. A computer-readable storage medium storing computer-executable instructions for performing steps (a) through (e) of the method of Claim 37.